



# National Minority Review

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## Food and Rent or Prescription Drugs: A Decision No One Should Have to Make

**By Congressman Bob Filner**

The year is 2031. You and your spouse retired several months ago, and now, just as you are beginning to settle in and enjoy your retirement, your spouse becomes very ill and is hospitalized.

Will you be able to focus your time and energy on nursing your spouse back to health? Or will you have to worry about huge prescription drug costs that force you to abandon your retirement dreams?

These questions will be answered this month in Washington, D.C. when Congress finally votes on whether or not to provide a prescription drug benefit for America's current and future seniors.

The facts are simple:

- Today, medical care requires prescription drug coverage. For all Americans - regardless of age - prescription drugs represent the promise of excellent 21st century medical practice.

- Soaring prices for prescription drugs are putting needed medicine out of reach for millions of seniors. Many are being forced to choose between paying for prescription drugs or paying for food and rent.

- Many seniors are seeing their retirement savings disappear as they struggle to pay for prescription drugs. Entire families face bankruptcy to pay for the medical care of their loved ones!

- The key to an adequately funded prescription drug benefit in Medicare is to attract enough people to spread the risk. The benefit will be feasible if healthy people and those requiring prescription drugs participate in the program.

I, along with the vast majority of my Democratic colleagues, support a simple straightforward solution to this problem: a Medicare prescription drug benefit that covers all seniors.

Under Medicare, this prescription drug benefit would be voluntary and universal - every senior would have access, no matter where they live or what their income. This plan is the best way to respond to today's crisis of care in America. It is imperative that this plan succeed because in coming years, as millions of baby boomers

reach retirement age, the situation will only become more acute.

There are many in Washington who do not support this idea. But this month, they will claim that they support America's seniors. They will talk about their plan for prescription drugs for seniors. But they will not be talking about all seniors!

The Republican plan would shortchange seniors of today and tomorrow in several crucial ways:

- Their plan would not cover all seniors. In fact, under their plan, the benefit would be so limited that it wouldn't be worthwhile for many middle-class seniors to enroll.

- Their plan does nothing to slow prescription drug prices from continuing their upward spiral.

- Their plan would force seniors to shop for and buy a private insurance plan, causing frustration for seniors forced to contend with insurance plans 'that come and go. In fact, the insurance companies' own association - the Health Insurance Association of America - has said that this plan will not work!

The Republican prescription drug plan is a sham proposal that provides no real guarantees at all. Instead, it maintains the status quo and protects the massive drug companies and HMOs profiting under the current system.

You can have an impact. Pick up the phone and make a call to your Congressman and U.S. Senators in Washington D.C. The number for the congressional switchboard is 202/224-3121. Let your elected officials know how you feel about prescription drug coverage for all of America's seniors.

The need for a universal prescription drug coverage benefit is real. The need is now. And the need is becoming more critical with each passing year.

Congressman Bob Filner represents California's 50th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives. His district includes southern San Diego, Chula Vista, and National City.